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ABSTRACT

The course selected for the creative approach was History and Philosophy of Early Childhood Education, an offering in the Department of Human Development. The subjects were 58 undergraduates in 3 classes. The creative approach required innovative student team presentations on seven early childhood education programs, and offered the choice of an individual creative alternative presentation to the term paper. Possibilities for originality were theme presentations, costumes, song, dance, film, poetry, and art. Questionnaire data favored the creative approach in terms of interest, learning, challenge, and personal satisfaction, even though it took more preparation time. Also, significantly more students selected the individual alternatives over the term papers. The questionnaire for evaluation of the creative approach is attached. (Author/JD)

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A CREATIVE APPROACH IN TEACHING UNDERGRADUATES

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Running Head: Creative Approach

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ABSTRACT

The course selected for the creative approach was History and Philosophy of Early Childhood Education, an offering in the Department of Human Development. Fifty-eight undergraduates in three classes participated as subjects. The creative approach required innovative student team presentations on seven early childhood education programs, and offered the choice of an individual creative alternative presentation to the term paper. Possibilities for originality were theme presentations, costumes, song, dance, film, poetry, and art. Questionnaire data favored the creative approach in terms of interest, learning, challenge, and personal satisfaction, even though it took more preparation time. Also, significantly more students selected the individual alternatives over the term papers.

A Creative Approach in Teaching Undergraduates

Like me, I suspect that most professors at one time or another face the problem of motivating students to do their best. After several years of teaching, I sensed from serendipitous happenings that active involvement of students, with great leeway permitted in that participation, and classroom camaraderie might be the solution to my problem. This line of thinking along with my love for originality led to the creative approach to be described. First, however, a comment about my Department and the course I chose for the creative approach.

My Department of Human Development focuses on all aspects of the life span in both the theoretical and applied domains. One thrust is early childhood with the applied area of training teachers in early childhood education. The course I selected for the creative approach is a junior/senior-level required subject for early childhood education majors--The History and Philosophy of Early Childhood Education. A few other students elect to take this class for liberal arts credit hours toward a bachelor degree or for updating a teaching certificate.

In History and Philosophy I began to require student team oral presentations with a creative touch, and to offer the choice of an individual creative alternative presentation to the traditional term paper. In this way a student had a taste of a creative endeavor with the support of team members and then an opportunity to repeat the creative approach on a solo basis, if he or she so chose. I continued to lecture, but to a lesser extent, as a background for the team presentations and solo

alternatives. I still required short papers related to the lectures and a comprehensive examination to ensure a writing experience for all students.

After many years of using this teaching technique, I decided to conduct a study for documentation of its effects. I collected data on the number of self-selected traditional term papers versus the number of creative alternatives to the term paper and on a questionnaire evaluating the creative approach.

Subjects and Settings

All the students in three classes of The History and Philosophy of Early Childhood Education participated as subjects. Two of the classes were taught on the main campus of the University of Kansas in Lawrence, Kansas. These two classes had 23 and 24 full-time undergraduates with two students in each class who were not early childhood majors. A smaller class of 11 non-traditional students was taught at the University's outreach campus in the Kansas City greater metropolitan area; five were early childhood majors, two were taking the course for liberal arts credit toward a bachelor degree, and four were updating teaching certificates. All data collected on the number of term papers versus the alternatives were tallied without student names, and the questionnaires were filled out anonymously.

Method

Initially, I lectured for several weeks, and then each of seven teams presented a different early childhood program over a period of four weeks. The number of students in a class was divided by seven to form teams, all of which were not equal in membership. I considered personal preferences

for team assignments. I gave each team a packet on their topic to supplement the text, Early childhood education: From theory to practice (Peters, Neisworth, and Yawkey, 1986). Additionally, each student was given a presentation checklist. Team presentations lasted approximately 45 min.

Next, a comprehensive exam was given over my lectures to date and the seven programs. After several more lectures, times were reserved for the self-selected alternative presentations to the term papers. Each alternative took approximately 20 min. and had to be completed by the penultimate class: term papers were due at this time also. On the final day of class term papers were returned, a lecture was given, and students evaluated the course.

Team Presentations

Topic and Content. The seven early childhood education programs were Froebel, Montessori, Engelmann/Becker, Piagetian-Derived, Open Education, Skinnerian-Derived, and Portage Project. The presentation checklist enumumerated the following: (a) orientation toward the process of learning; (b) relation to pioneer early childhood philosophers/educators; (c) attitude toward childhood; (d) goals; (e) curriculum; (f) teaching method; (g) organization; (h) effectiveness; (i) practicality; (j) strengths and weaknesses; (k) class handout; and (l) creativity of presentation. This checklist was a modification of Spodek's (1973, pp. 29-31) framework of analysis for early childhood programs. Overall, the presentation encapsulated creativity of implementation with the constraint of the checklist--innovation and realism.

Conference. A week or more before the presentation I had a conference with each team to stimulate their creativity. I explained the possibilities available for originality -- a theme presentation, homemade curriculum materials, unusual curriculum activities not found in resource books, costumes, and unique handouts. Too, I encouraged imaginative ideas related to their personal interests and hobbies (e.g., sports, photography, music, dance, drama, film, poetry, and art). Taking the class to another site to enhance the creativity was a possibility, weather and time permitting.

Grading. The number of points earned for a perfect presentation was two hundred. One hundred of these points was given for the creative approach. I was placing my value system on the line. All the items on the checklist, except creativity, lend themselves to objective grading. The grading of the creative approach was somewhat subjective. Professional acting, artwork, costumes, and so forth, however, were not required. The creative concept was given more weight than a polished implementation.

Term Papers

Topic and Content. The term paper topic was "Your Philosophy of Early Childhood Education and Implementation of Your Program." Students choosing this term paper option used the same checklist as for the early childhood programs in the team presentations, except for the class handout and the creative approach. This 10-12 page typewritten paper with references could relate to preschool, day care, afterschool care, or summer

camp for typical and/or atypical children. Specialty programs such as shopping mall flextime care or a hospital humor room for children were acceptable.

Conference and Grading. Conferences for the term paper were not mandatory, but available. The maximum points for the term papers was two hundred, and the scoring here considered the aforementioned modified checklist.

Alternatives to Term Paper

Topic and Content. The alternative to the term paper could be an oral creative presentation comparing two diametrically opposed approaches to early childhood education (e.g., Skinnerian-Derived vs. Open Education). Or a topic related to one of my lectures could be selected (e.g., behavioral and phenomenological models of man, child advocacy; life-span development; attitudes towards childhood as they have changed over the centuries; pioneer early childhood educators/philosophers, professional ethics, trends in early childhood education from 1850-1990).

Conference and Grading. Conferences for the alternatives were mandatory, since alternatives had to be approved before presentation. My main concerns were that the alternative have substantial content and careful implementation. As in the team presentations the creative touch need not be professional, but thoughtful and well-prepared. The number of points that could be earned for the alternative was equal to that earned for the term paper, two hundred.

Results

Creativity

Team. A characteristic sampling of team efforts follows. A pastor in ministerial garb conducted a funeral service for Froebel distributing to each mourner an in-memoriam folder describing his first kindergarten. During the service Froebel's Gifts and Occupations were illustrated as to their practical use and symbolism. Montessori wearing a veiled hat and black dress covering an ample bosom introduced us to several of her Casa dei Bambini children who demonstrated their didactic routines while she told us the underpinnings of her program. Dr. Engelmann and Dr. Becker showed up in surgical gowns, masks and booties to plan an "operation" for a disadvantaged child suffering from a cultural language deficit; the class received handouts in the format of a medical report.

The Open Education Rock Group dressed in funky clothes rapped a description of their laissez-faire program. Their curriculum activity was to publish an edition of the Open News with all class members serving as reporters, leaving the classroom to complete their assignments, and typing up and assembling their stories back in the pressroom. White-haired Piaget appeared on "This Is Your Life" and had surprise visits from Freud, Erikson, and Skinner who asked penetrating questions about the Piagetian-Derived early childhood program.

Dorothy, Tinman, Scarecrow, and Cowardly Lion walked the yellow brick road to ask the Wizard of Oz his thoughts on the viability of the Skinnerian-Derived early childhood education program. Finally, a case worker from the Portage Project with a briefcase overflowing with Parental Behavior Inventories, graphs, and the complete Portage Curriculum Card File

(i.e., infant stimulation, language, cognitive, socialization, motor, and self-help) knocked on the door of an Appalachian home, was greeted by a pregnant woman with her hair in curlers and a preschool child, and sat down for an intensive home lesson in teaching colors and shapes.

Individual. A sampling of these unique efforts showed students capitalizing on their personal talents, interests, and abilities. A guitarist played two original musical compositions, one capturing the essence of a behavioral model in education and the other a phenomenological model; the class discussed the characteristics of these two models in relation to rhythm, dissonance, and timbre. A photographer showed pictures he had taken related to Erikson's eight life span stages. Another photographer enlightened us with a slide show of an intergenerational day care center, a recent trend in early childhood education. An artist presented drawings depicting the attitudes toward childhood as they have changed over the centuries--the miniature adult, the romantic child, the trained child, the little prince, and the democratic child.

An architect displayed floor plans for a child care center capturing the strengths of the seven early childhood models studied. A nurse led us in preschool-style stress reduction exercises after explaining the tensions in a contemporary child's life--divorce, superbaby syndrome, threat of nuclear war, and poverty. An advertising major made a pitch for his home education model complete with a professional brochure and slogan, "Home is where the smart is." Finally, a student literally brought us all down on our knees to put together a large floor puzzle which listed the pioneer educators/philosophers (Plato, Aristotle, Quintillian, Commenius, Rousseau, Pestolozzi, Herbart, Seguin, and Binet) and their accomplishments.

Term Paper vs Alternative

Analyzing the three classes individually, the number of traditional term papers (4, 4, & 5) in comparison to the number of creative alternative (7, 29, & 18) did not differ as shown by a Pearson Chi-Square test (chi value 1.693 p=0.429). Collapsing the data across the three classes on the choice of a term paper vs. an alternative did show a difference from chance (i.e., one half of the subjects [29] selecting each option) in using an orthogonal comparison ($X2 = 17.66$, $df=1$, $p < .001$) with 13 selecting term papers and 45, the alternatives.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire evaluating the creative approach had five questions as exhibited in Figure 1. The grand mean of responding across all questions

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Insert Figure 1 about here

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on a 5-point Likert scale with 1 representing NO and 5, YES was 4.5333. A t-test showed this grand mean differed significantly from the chance mean of 3 ($t = 17.42$, $p < .001$). Table 1 indicates the response to the first question was the highest on the Likert scale of five (5); there was disarray on the remaining questions. A comparison of each individual question mean to each other question mean showed question 1 (more interesting), 2 (more learning), and 4 (more personal satisfaction) to be noticeably robust toward the YES scale.

Insert Table 1 about here

Discussion

These students were given the opportunity to use their personal interests, talents, and abilities in this classroom experience, and they did as shown by the multifacted creativity in both the team and individual presentations. Too, they were far more likely to select the individual presentation over the term paper. According to the questionnaire these students found the class an interesting, satisfying learning experience, although they did assess that the creative approach required more preparation time than the traditional teaching approach.

Is this creative approach in teaching suitable for all teachers? Probably not. The teacher needs a proclivity for creativity in order to stimulate students toward their own creative efforts. Too, the teacher needs to be willing to have conferences with students before their presentations; needless to say, this is time-consuming. A teacher using this approach must foster camaraderie in the class to calm stagefright, and not every teacher's style includes this good fellowship. Finally, a small-size class is needed for manageability. Thus, this creative approach does not fit every teacher's personality, style, and situation. Fortunately, other imaginative teaching options in sources such as the Holistic Education Review and Focus may be considered.

Dewey (1904) emphasized the importance of teachers' reflecting on their practices and integrating their observations into their emerging theories. Floden and Klinzing (1990) have extended Dewey's reflection to empirical investigations done by the teachers themselves. Only with this reflective research can teachers understand the effects of their

implementation of a teaching practice on their students. The present research was an effort in this direction.

Table 2

A Comparison of the Mean Responses of Questions 1 through 5

X	Q5 (4.33)	Q4 (4.57)	Q2 (4.65)	Q1 (4.80)
Q3 (4.31)	0.02	0.26*	0.34*	0.49*
Q5 (4.33)		0.24*	0.32*	0.47*
Q4 (4.57)			0.08	0.23*
Q2 (4.65)				0.15*

p=.05

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Figure 1. The questionnaire had five questions evaluating the creative approach. This questionnaire was completed by the students on the last day of the course.

HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

EVALUATION OF CREATIVE APPROACH

(Please circle one number after each question).

	NO				YES
1. Do you feel the creative touch required in your oral presentations versus a conventional presentation makes the class more interesting?	1	2	3	4	5
2. Do you feel you learn more from a creative presentation as opposed to a conventional presentation?	1	2	3	4	5
3. Do you feel more challenged in planning a creative presentation as opposed to a conventional presentation?	1	2	3	4	5
4. Do you feel more personal satisfaction from a creative presentation as opposed to a conventional presentation.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Do you put more preparation time into a creative presentation as opposed to a conventional presentation?	1	2	3	4	5